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Title: Paraprofessional

Organization or Agency: AFSCME Local 1303-399

Topic: HB 6881 - An Act Concerning Various Revisions to The Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, ranking members and members of the education committee. My name is Wendy Lebouef and I'm here speaking with you today as a resident of Woodstock Connecticut, a paraprofessional of 11 years at Woodstock Elementary School, and as a member of AFSCME Local 1303-399, the Woodstock paraprofessionals' union.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 6881, concerning paraprofessional compensation, training, and working conditions. I believe that passing House Bill 6881 would be an important step towards improving the work lives of Paraprofessionals throughout the state and thus improving the quality of education that our children receive.

I have worked as a paraprofessional for 11 years. Prior to that, I worked as a teacher for 13 years and I have a master's degree in teaching. My breadth of experience working in education has shown me time and time again that working as a paraprofessional is uniquely challenging. Despite being over-worked, understaffed, and underappreciated, we go above and beyond to support our students, but we need support too. Improved professional development opportunities would allow us to better care and provide for the children that we work with. We work directly with students and thus should have a say in the type of professional development that we are receiving. Allowing the Para Advisory Council to make recommendations on the type of professional development that we receive would go a long way towards positioning us and our students to be successful in the classroom.

Additionally, my 24 years of hands-on-experience has provided me with a greater understanding of what our students need to be successful in school. Currently, paraprofessionals are not permitted to participate in planning and placement meetings for students despite directly working with and teaching students all day long. This is a disservice to the students that we work with, as our hands-on role as paraprofessionals allows us to better understand their needs and unique challenges in the classroom. Allowing paraprofessionals to participate in these meetings would undoubtedly improve the quality of education that our students receive.

Paraprofessionals do this job because of the love we have for the amazing children we see each and every day. I am here speaking today because I wholeheartedly believe that passing this bill will enable paraprofessionals to better serve the students that we work with. Thank you for listening and I urge you to support this legislation.

Wendy LeBoeuf